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SUBJECT: COORDINATED ATTACKS IN YALA; NEW SECURITY LAW TO  
BE ANNOUNCED

Classified By: DCM Alex A. Arvizu. Reason 1.4 (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: On July 14, suspected Muslim separatist insurgents launched a series of coordinated attacks in the far southern Thai province of Yala. The militants targeted Thai security forces, power transformers and public buildings with bombing, shooting and arson attacks. Two police were killed and 22 people (including three suspected militants) were reportedly injured. The highly organized assaults are another escalation in the ongoing violence afflicting Thailand's Muslim majority provinces. Separately, the cabinet has reportedly approved a new emergency security law giving additional powers to Thai security forces in areas already under martial law. While the new law has been in the works for several months, Deputy Prime Minister Chaturon told Ambassador the recent attacks are the impetus behind their likely imminent approval. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) On July 14, a series of apparently well coordinated bombing, shooting and arson attacks occurred in the far southern province of Yala. Yala Deputy Governor for Security Winyu Thongsakul told Emboffs that there were as many as 18 separate attacks in the province beginning around 7:00 p.m. local. Two police were killed and least 22 people were injured (including two additional police and three of the suspected militants) in the attacks. Five separate bombs were reported, including at least one targeting an electrical transformer - which knocked out power to large parts of the province. A school, warehouse and retail shop were also struck. The attackers left five separate fake bombs in various locations as an indication of the unusual degree of planning, and scattered road spikes on main roads to deter pursuit by authorities. Deputy Governor Winyu called this was the most coordinated attack seen this year, and a blatant challenge to authority. Police have reportedly arrested at least three of the perpetrators. In a separate incident on July 15, two teachers were gunned down while on their way to school in the neighboring province of Narathiwat by unidentified gunmen.

3. (C) Only July 15, Prime Minister Thaksin convened an emergency cabinet meeting to discuss the previous day's incidents. In a meeting with the Ambassador immediately following the cabinet meeting, Deputy Prime Minister Chaturon Chaisaeng (meeting will be reported septel) told the Ambassador that the cabinet had approved an emergency act to replace the selective martial law already in place in parts of the South. Chaturon indicated that the new law had been in the works for several months, but the overnight incidents in Yala provided the impetus to move them forward. Chaturon said the laws would be issued by "Royal Proclamation" and thus not require parliamentary approval. Chaturon characterized the new laws as an effort to actually "soften" the harsh image of martial law, and indicated that the powers granted would not be greater than those under martial law. (NOTE: It will be difficult for the government to overcome the impression that any such law is anything but a strong countermeasure designed to give authorities more leeway to combat the militants, however. END NOTE) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will give a briefing on July 18 to the diplomatic community to explain the new emergency laws in detail.

4. (C) COMMENT: The highly organized attacks in Yala represent another escalation in the long history of violence in Thailand's troubled South. The attacks are especially disturbing given the coordination and discipline evidenced in the series of simultaneous attacks. END COMM